



Farmer commitments in Cape to City and Poutiri Ao ō Tāne.

Farmer Engagement

The Predator Free Hawke's Bay pest control team actively engage with ~50 landowners and managers within the project area. Life style blocks have been included in all project communication and newsletters, and have been included in the trapping programme as individuals have contacted us. Two farms were included in the wireless trap monitoring trials using Encounter Solution nodes.

Since Poutiri Ao ō Tāne was initiated in 2011, five landowners have been a part of the project, then as part of the extension in 2019 an additional five properties were brought on board.

Rural Survey

A survey of Cape to City landowners/managers and in the surrounding area was conducted in 2015 (Niemic et al., 2015). The survey concluded that similar to previous studies, landowners consider the potential socio-economic and ecological benefits of invasive species control and express a strong desire to enhance native biodiversity. However, we also find that landowners take into account the complexity of the local social and ecological context in which a programme will unfold in three ways: they consider 1) the level of contribution by other landowners and urban residents who are benefiting from collective control efforts; 2) the potential for the programme to upset the local "ecological balance", leading to increases in other pests; and 3) the probability that the programme will be successful given the likelihood of others participating and control tactics being effective. The survey authors suggested that managers of coordinated invasive species control efforts may benefit from devoting time and resources towards addressing beliefs about social and ecological context, rather than solely providing financial subsidies and information about control tactics or the impacts of invasive species.

This piece of research specifically informed the project team's thinking particularly around participation and compliance of programmes. The 2015 survey resulted in some significant shifts in Hawke's Bay Regional Council (HBRC) policy including a more equitable distribution of costs for predator control. Additionally it was the impetus to add in Possum Eradication and Predator Suppression Areas into the Regional Pest Management Plan (see next section).

Now, four years on, the survey is being re run and aims to identify and understand shifts in perspective and attitude.

Regional Pest Management Plan

The Hawke's Bay Regional Pest Management Plan (RPMP) guides ~80% of the biosecurity work undertaken by HBRC which is supported by the Biosecurity Act 1993. The RPMP has been the foundation of the regional Possum Control Area (PCA) programme, protecting HBRC investment and managing long term possum populations regionally. A PCA is created once written agreements have been entered into with 75% or more of the total proposed land area. HBRC then undertakes initial knock down of possums, and landowners are required to maintain low numbers (4% residual trap catch) in perpetuity. The RPMP was reviewed over 2017-18 which included the release of a discussion document, public consultation, and submissions process. The final document was released early 2019. The new RPMP now contains the mechanism to create both Possum Eradication (PEA) and Predator Suppression Areas (PSA). The Whakatipu Māhia project recently reached significant milestones, achieving the 75% threshold for landowners signed onto both of these new Areas – a New Zealand first and testament to the support from the landowners and managers.

Commitment into the future

The mechanism to secure investment in possum eradication and predator suppression long term is now in place. The vision is to be able to roll out a regional programme much like the original PCA programme. This can be done once a cost-effective and efficient template for possum eradication is completed (Whakatipu Māhia), and further funding is found.

Currently our predator control team maintain the podiTRAP (maintenance) network in the Predator Free Hawke's Bay projects. Some individuals check traps on their individual properties. We anticipate that expectations on landowners and managers will stay at this level of participation until a region wide possum eradication programme is rolled out, and conversations with individual landowners and managers regarding sign up to the new PEA and PSA areas will begin.

Contractor Process

Given a potential future region wide possum eradication and predator suppression programme, contractors will play a key role.

We envision the regional programme to be similar in structure to the PCA, with the region divided into discrete areas, and contractors tendered for each area. Given the eradication nature of the programme, areas will need to be based on geographical barriers to possum movement and the ability to defend those areas. While the final contracts will be worked through in more detail, contracts are likely to extend over a significant period of time (perhaps years) in order to collect enough monitoring data to determine zero density, and to respond to any incursions or detections.

The project team are currently running a process to include contractors in the development of how a regional eradication programme might be rolled out. A call for proposals was requested, and the team will review each proposal, provide feedback, and use key points to integrate into an overall plan moving forward.

Conclusion

Perspective on landholder engagement and commitments has developed over time and will continue to develop particularly with the vision of a regional roll out.

